



the Australia and New Zealand

School of Government

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CASE PROGRAM

2007-42.2

## The New Zealand Teachers Council's First Year (B)

Rowena Phair, senior manager of the school labour market policy group at the Ministry of Education, ended her meeting with chief executive Howard Fancy with a new task. The Teachers Council, set up a year earlier, was facing a crisis processing teacher registrations and Fancy had said “fix it”.

On 6 March 2003, Phair had been at a meeting where Council director Margaret Kouvelis asked the Minister of Education for \$120,000 to employ 12 extra staff to clear the backlog of registrations. Kouvelis had also said the Council would get back to Mallard with a full strategic business plan that would require a lot more funding.

Phair wasn't convinced that money was the problem. The Council had a healthy bank balance, including \$3.8m on term deposit. She didn't accept the argument that this money had to be kept for the periods when income from registration fees dropped away

Instead, Phair believed that a lack of focus on core business was behind the Council's problems. “It doesn't matter how clever your leadership strategies are, if you can't process registrations, you will have no credibility,” she said. The Council needed to process applications every day and reduce the number of transactions with individual teachers. “There are 70,000 teachers. If you are going to have five interactions with each, it is going to mean a hell of a lot more work than if you have one.” The fact that teachers had to ring the Council for an application form and couldn't download it from the website in itself created a huge number of calls.

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This case was written by Pip Desmond, with editorial assistance from Janet Tyson, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, for Rose Anne MacLeod, Senior Fellow, Victoria University of Wellington. It has been prepared for teaching purposes to accompany the case 2007-42.1 and the case epilogue 2007-42.3. The use of teaching materials is restricted to authorised persons.

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After the meeting with Kouvelis, Phair advised Mallard to engage specialist outside help to look into the Council's data management and customer service systems, although she said she did not think he needed at that stage to invoke his ministerial powers to direct the Council about its performance. But Mallard wanted the problem fixed internally by the Ministry and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. Now Fancy had made it her responsibility, even though she had no experience of implementing operational processes.

On 11 March, *The Dominion Post* reported that Mallard was demanding solutions to delays by the Teachers Council to complete teacher registrations. Teachers claimed to have waited up to six months for their certificates to be renewed. Mallard said he was very concerned. "And I want it sorted out."<sup>1</sup>

The same day, the Council updated its strategic business plan requesting total funding of \$1.125m, and sent it to the Ministry of Education. After Phair's meeting with Fancy, the ball was in her court.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Teachers wait as council struggles,' *The Dominion Post*, 11 March 2003